

BAPTISM IN THE HIGHLANDS

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THE Old Irish life of St. Columba states that Patrick, "the father of baptism and doctrine of the Gaidhel," placed his two hands on Conall, the great-grandfather and on Fergus, the grandfather of Columcille and prophesied that out of their tribe there would be born a youth "beloved, the bright, clear luminary." That youth, Columcille, or Columba, became, if not the first, at least the most famous of the "fathers of baptism and of doctrine of the Gaidhel." The labours of Ninian and of the missionaries whose home was Candida Casa were not fruitless, but the Celtic Church in Scotland was substantially what Columba, his fellow-workers and disciples made it.

The Gaelic word "baist", Old Gaelic "baitsim" came to the language through church Latin. There is another old word "baithis", also meaning baptism. It may be connected with the Latin, but Dr. MacBain (*Etymological Dictionary*) believes that the root there is "bad", "drown." George Henderson (*Survivals of Belief*, p. 216) says: "Even if the Gaelic word "Baist" be taken from the Latin, the lustral rite itself was known in pre-Christian times. The *Cogadh Gaidhel re Gallaibh*, which describes the Norse invasion of Ireland, refers to pagan baptism." The outward form of the rite was therefore not new to the Gaidhels of Scotland and Ireland.

Adamnan describes a baptism administered by St. Columba in Glen Urquhart. "He there found an aged man whose name was Emchat, who, on hearing the word of God preached by the saint, believed and was baptized and immediately after, full of joy and safe from evil and accompanied by the angels, who came to meet him, passed to the Lord. His son, Virolec also believed and was baptized with all his house."¹ The large size of the surviving baptismal fonts of the period suggests that immersion was a common mode of administering the rite. Aspersions was also practised² It was reported at the Synod of Cashel (1172) that it was anciently the

¹ Reeves', *St. Columba*, p. 203

² Warren: *Liturgies etc. of Celtic Church*, pp. 64-65.

practice that the father of the infant, shortly after birth, himself dipped the child in water. Richer fathers used milk for this rite. The death of the baptized person, shortly after receiving baptism, was regarded as a mark of God's favour. Artbranan, the aged Skyeman, whose natural goodness had been preserved all his life, received the word of God through an interpreter, was baptized and died instantly.¹ The close connection between Word and Sacrament is to be noted in this and other instances. In the West Highlands and especially in Argyllshire, the memory of the Celtic Church has been preserved in tale and legend even up to our own day. In the four centuries during which the Latin Church held complete sway in Scotland, the connection between Word in the sense of instruction in the Faith and the sacramental rite, became tenuous and the doctrine that baptism was absolutely necessary to salvation became explicit. The Scottish Reformers reacted strongly against this doctrine as against certain symbolic accretions, such as the use of oil, salt, spittle which had become an accepted part of the sacrament.

Before the Reformation came to Scotland, the Reformed doctrine of Word and Sacraments had already been moulded by the great Continental teachers. Its Scottish exponents struck no new note, except that they were more ruthless in removing from worship and religious practice certain customs which they regarded as not explicitly enjoined by the Scriptures. By and large, they accepted John Calvin as their master. The sacraments were not naked and bare signs. In baptism, we are, according to the Scots Confession, "ingrafted in Christ Jesus to be made partakers of His justice, by which our sinnes are covered and remitted." According to the Book of Common Order, the sponsor at the baptism of an infant "earnestly desires that he may be ingrafted in the mystical body of Christ." The use of "oyle, salt, spittal and suchlike is improper."² One element only, water "does the turn and fully represents the washing of our souls with the blood of Christ and therefore there is no need for other sign."³ Baptism is a holy sign and seal annexed to the preached Word of God and "there can be no sacrament unless it can be hung to the evident of the Word."⁴ For valid baptism, water and the baptismal formula in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost must be used. Papists kept the essential form of the sacrament, though with unscriptural accretions. Their baptism is valid. Both sacraments are instruments to exhibit and deliver the thing that they signify, yet "Christ is not corporally and locally

¹ Reeves : p. 25.

² *Scots Confession*.

³ *Robert Bruce's Sermons*.

⁴ *Bruce's First Sermon*.

brought out of heaven to be in the place of the elements or to be included in them";¹ and "all the seals in the world will not work except the Spirit of God concur and seal the same truth in your hearts which the sacrament seals outwardly."² Baptism, being the fulfilment of circumcision, the sacrament of repentance and faith attached to the Abrahamic covenant, is the privilege of all who are within the new covenant; and the children of the faithful, being holy seed, are inheritors of the promises of God, and ought to receive the seal and token of the covenant, which is baptism. Should a child who is within the covenant, however, die without the benefit of baptism, he may be saved by the promise alone.

This baptismal doctrine was set forth in catechisms that were admirable in their clarity and conciseness, such as those of Calvin, Davidson and Craig, in the Scots Confession of 1560, the First Book of Discipline, the Book of Common Order and in the preaching of the Reformers. A generation later, Robert Bruce of Kinnaird, in his sermons on the sacraments, though he dealt chiefly with the Lord's Supper, gave classic expression to the Scottish Reformed teaching. How far did this teaching penetrate beyond the Highland line and become the standard of the people's faith during the first two or three generations after 1560? Unfortunately, we cannot answer this question with any precision. A Gaelic version of the Book of Common Order, with an additional service for a blessing on a ship on being launched, was published in 1567. It was the work of John Carswell, superintendent of Argyll and in 1566 Bishop of the Isles. Though he disclaims a scholarly knowledge of Gaelic, it is an excellent piece of work and done in the literary Gaelic then common to both Ireland and Scotland. It is not an unwarranted assumption that a literary knowledge of Gaelic among educated Highlanders was commoner in the sixteenth century than it was (say) in the eighteenth century, when many Highland ministers had to translate currently from the English Bible, even when officiating in the pulpit.³ A Gaelic version of Calvin's Catechism, probably also the work of Carswell, was published in 1631 some sixty years after his death.⁴ It is uncertain how far those books penetrated, or what influence they had; but as things then were, the political decisions of the great chiefs and the teaching of the pulpit were more important. The Earl of Argyll, who probably helped Carswell to publish

¹ *Davidson's Catechism.*

² *Bruce's First Sermon.*

³ By the year 1698, one thousand seven hundred and seventy copies of Kirk's Gaelic Bible (published 1690) were distributed through northern synods and presbyteries; but many ministers, including such a distinguished scholar and collector of Gaelic folk-poetry as Alexander Pope of Reay, could neither read or write Gaelic.

⁴ Three copies have survived, one of them in Trinity College library, Glasgow.

his Gaelic "Common Order", made an itinerary of Cowal in 1574 and made provision for the prayers, the administration of the sacraments and the forms of church discipline, which were to be "after the order of Geneva, translated out of the English into the Irish tongue by master John Carswell, late bishop of the Isles." In 1597, the General Assembly sent a commission to the north and "in passing through Moray, Inverness and Ross the visitors found an unexpected avidity for religious instruction and great readiness on the part of the principal proprietors to Make provision for it. Foremost among these . . . was Lachlan Mor Mackintosh (16th chief) who met the deputation in Inverness and subscribed obligations for payment of stipend in different parishes on his estate."¹ W. C. MacKenzie, a judicious historian, remarks that while there were dissenting communities throughout the country and relatively to population, these were most numerous in the Highlands, yet the Isles and the western seaboard were the areas in which, after the Reformation, the planting of churches was peculiarly active. Though a somewhat later generation made the proverb "If Badyenoch is bad enough, then Lochaber's twice as worse," yet in the 18th century the Camerons used to boast that they had been Protestants from the time of the Reformation.² Robert Bruce of Kinnaird, exiled to Inverness in 1605, conducted a mission there which popular tradition has cherished. Multitudes from neighbouring parishes flocked to hear him. "Yea, they came from Ross and Sutherland."³ One writer has called him the "great apostle of the north." The acceptance, in 1609, by nine of the great West Highland chiefs, of the Statutes of Iona, which bound them to support "the true religion publicly taught, preached and professed within the realm of Scotland," was of lasting value. Trained ministers gradually replaced the readers and exhorters, though as late as 1647, the Synod of Moray reported to the General Assembly "the desolate condition of Badyenoch by reason of the "vaccancie of all the kirks . . . as likewise . . . the fearful state of Lochaber . . . in the time of Poprie had thrie paroch churches well provided and now since the Reformation never hath there been any care had to fill these churches with any minister . . . the people to this houre were never taught if Christ came in the world or that there is a Sabbath or life to come."⁴

I propose to examine baptismal teaching and practice within the Highland area from the time of the Reformation, with a view to discovering how far the Reformed teaching became the people's faith and,

¹ Transactions of Gaelic Society of Inverness, XIX, p. 50.

² *Highlands of Scotland in 1750*. Ed. Andrew Lang.

³ *Transactions of Gaelic Soc. of Inverness*, XIX, 51; *Inverness Assembly*, 1881.

⁴ MacLeod J. : *Lochaber and its Evangelical Traditions*, 17.

where divergences occur, to seek the reason therefor and the Church's reactions thereto.

(1) *Sponsors*. According to the "Order of Baptism" in the Book of Common Order, father and godfather (Gaelic : goistidh) are both sponsors. In many cases, there were additional godparents. The increasing tendency of the courts of the Church was to depreciate the role of the godparents and to stress the responsibility of the parents. In 1659, Robert Duncanson reported to the Synod of Argyll that parents in Ardnamurchan are "not holding up their own children to baptize" and two years later, the same Synod caused "a letter to be written to the gentlemen in the presbyterie of Sky to concurr with the ministers to cause parents to hold up their owne children to baptisme and the ministers to hold out the conveniency and necessity thereof."¹ Parents who were under discipline or excommunicate "are not to hold up their bairnes, but a frein that will oblige for them . . ."² But more usually the baptism of illegitimate children is delayed till the parent or parents give satisfaction, or adequate surety be taken for their future obedience.³

Until the Evangelical revivals of the 18th and 19th centuries, the standard of religious knowledge required from parents was modest. During the post-Reformation period "all who sought baptism for their children were required to be able to repeat the Lord's Prayer, The Belief, the Ten Commandments and it was the duty of the reader to instruct the ignorant."⁴ In Argyll, during the period of the Commonwealth, parents from vacant parishes, coming to a neighbouring parish to seek baptism for their children, had to bring with them a certificate of fitness from the session, or in the case of a parish, such as Coll, where there is apparently no session, a "testificat" from the bailie of the island and they are to come at least one day before the Sabbath, that "they may be tried in the grounds of religion, at least some of the chief heads thereof."⁵ In 1688, the Presbytery of Inverness enacted: "At the baptizing of infants, the parents make confession of the faith by owning and acknowledging the Apostles' Creed as also that after prayer the Lord's Prayer be subjoined."⁶ In this case, apparently, the Creed was used as a part of the Baptismal service and not as a standard for examining the religious knowledge of the parent.

¹ *Synod of Argyll Minutes*, II, 201, 202, 236.

² *Ibid.* II, 28.

³ *Ibid.*, II, 5, 6.

⁴ *Book of Common Order*, Ed. Sprott, Introd.

⁵ *Synod of Argyll*, II, 101, 129.

⁶ *Inverness and Dingwall Pres. Records* (S.H.S.), 133.

After the Revolution, though the Creed never formed part of the baptismal service, the normal standard of religious knowledge required of applicants for baptism did not greatly change. In 1710, Alexander Buchan was charged to teach the people of St. Kilda "the Ten Commands, the Belief, and Lord's Prayer, their Baptism and the nature of the Lord's Supper what it signifieth and the Covenant of Grace what it promiseth and what they are bound to do and what God promiseth."¹ At the baptism in Inverness witnessed by Captain Burt (1726), the father holds up the child before the pulpit, from whence the minister gives a long extemporary exhortation concerning its education, but he says nothing about a prior examination of the parent.² As baptism, where it could be had, was practically universal, the minimum standard of knowledge could not have been high. A very special importance in the matter of the examination of baptismal sponsors is to be accorded to a small group of ministers, especially Thomas Hog (minister of Kiltearn, Rossshire, 1654-1690, but "outed" during the period of the Restoration Episcopacy), and John MacKillican, for a time minister of Fodderty. Hog's importance rests not so much on an outstandingly influential ministry, but on the fact that his pastoral practice became, through the medium of successive generations of the "Men" of Ross and Sutherland, the accepted norm in Evangelical parishes. After the Disruption, this practice was generally accepted by the Highland Free Church.³ In Hog's Memoirs we read: "Part of the method which he (Hog) found most countenanced by God was . . . that he set time apart to converse fully and freely with those who sought the privilege of baptism for their children and if he found them ignorant of the nature and ends of that sacrament, he was at great pains to bring them to repentance and reformation, *as if they had been really scandalous* and kept them from the benefit of baptism till he discovered a change in them for the better."⁴ He was even stricter in his examination of candidates for the Lord's Supper and here we note one of the origins of what may be called the double standard of sanctity recognised so widely in the Highlands even today. The most famous instance of this strict pastoral examination is that of John (Caird) Munro. Munro, one of the most unruly of his young parishioners, being found deficient in religious knowledge and being refused baptism for his child, charged the minister with cruelty; but Hog countered "If I should administer baptism to your child without warning you of your hazard, I should be more cruel than you, for you would perish in your iniquity and I should have your blood on my hands."⁵ Munro was

¹ S.P.C.K. *Records*, 1710.

² *Burt's Letters*, I, 228 (Jamieson's Ed.).

³ *Kennedy's Days of the Fathers in Ross-shire*.

⁴ *Memoirs of Thomas Hog*.

⁵ *Ibid.*

shortly after converted and became the most outstanding lay religious leader in Ross-shire. Subsequent generations of the "Men" looked upon him as their prototype and through them Hog's strict practice was disseminated and perpetuated.

James Hall, writing of Ross-shire in 1800, said that "they (ministers and elders) were very scrupulous about the character of those they admitted to the sacraments . . . carrying their enquiries almost to the full length of auricular confession."¹ When the Evangelical revivals took hold of a large part of the Highlands and Islands in the early 19th century, stricter examination of candidates for baptism became the rule. Walter MacKay, catechist in Braes (Portree), though esteemed as a man of gifts and graces, was reckoned in some points wider than the Skye "Fathers". In regard to receiving applicants for baptism, it is said that he was not so particular and scrupulous and this led to some friction with his brethren.²

I hope to deal later on with the results of attempts to abolish the double standard for baptism and the Lord's Supper, but meantime it is necessary to point out that the strict dealing which was the norm in certain districts was by no means universal. In parishes unaffected by the 18th century revivals, that is, the great majority, the practice was the reverse of strict. Alexander MacLeod, inducted to Uig, Lewis in 1826, states in his Diary that "all and sundry" were admitted to both sacraments.³ Under his preaching, powerful in its evangelical fervour, the number of communicants was reduced from eight hundred to six. Somewhat later, Archibald Cook of Barvas tells that "one poor man had to testify that he had never heard of a diet of catechetical instruction and another that five of his children had been baptized, but that not one question was ever asked by the minister concerning his own salvation . . . The sacraments were administered in a stupified manner."⁴ After the Disruption, parish ministers were often accused of giving baptism indiscriminately to refugees from Free Church discipline and thus adding to their depleted congregations. The Free Church, while raising the standard required from applicants for baptism, adhered, as it does to this day, to the principle of an *uncontradicted* standard for baptism and an *accredited* standard for the Lord's Supper. The Church of Scotland congregations in the Northern Highlands, by and large, accept the same working principle. Less is expected of the applicant for baptism than of the candidate for communion. The meaning of this "less" varies, however, in the different

¹ *Travels*, 205.

² MacCowan: *Men of Skye*, 182.

³ *Alexander MacLeod's Diary*.

⁴ *Memorabilia Domistica*, D. Sage, 296.

branches of the Highland Presbyterian Church. While in the Free Presbyterian Church, both sacraments are automatically refused to persons doing Sunday work, or travelling in public vehicles plying for hire on the Sabbath day, in the Church of Scotland in, say Lewis, the ordinary requirements are "that the parent or sponsor shows interest in the church, attends fairly regularly and is of good character." I am not aware that in any Highland Church of Scotland congregations today, sponsors, free from scandal and of fair repute, are examined today by kirk-sessions as to their religious knowledge.

(2) *The place and time of baptism* has an obvious bearing on the church's attitude to the Roman teaching that baptism was absolutely essential to salvation. Private baptism as soon as possible after birth was an almost necessary consequence of this belief. The church standards required public baptism and that it be administered in church during public worship or in any other place, whether Sabbath or weekday, where the people regularly convene to hear the Word. The General Assembly of 1602 permitted baptism on any day and the Five Articles of Perth, in 1618, allowed private baptism. In 1645, the Assembly approved the new Directory for the Publick Worship of God which provided that baptism be "not administered in private places or privately, but in the place of public worship and in the face of the congregation." The Rescissory Act of 1661, however, made the Directory illegal and private baptism was again allowed. The General Assembly Act of 1690, making private administration of the sacraments illegal, was the law of the Church until 1957.

In 1642, the Synod of Argyll ordained "that no minister baptize in private places but either in the paroch church or in places that has been used for the divyne service."¹ In 1649, during the visitation of the kirk of Lochcarron, the Presbytery of Dingwall asked the minister "if he did keep a weekday for catechising, baptisme and marriage and answered yt did appoint Thursday for yt affect. The Prie ordained said day to be keiped."² In 1657, the Synod of Argyll "does think fitt . . . that session, marriage and baptisemes shall be rather celebrated at the exercises and preachings on the weekday than on the Lord's Day."³ During the 17th century troubles, both Presbyterians and Episcopalians were compelled to resort to private baptism. Duncan MacCalman, deposed from Ardnurchan for malignancy, "does dayly in the barbarouse and remote Highlands baptize children . . . coming to him to that effect . . . and it was declared that baptisemes be the said accused person to stand in no

¹ *Synod of Argyll*, I, 36.

² *Inverness and Dingwall Pres. Rec.*, 151.

³ *Synod of Argyll*, II, 147.

force at all.”¹ While a few years later, when Episcopacy was dominant, James Urquhart, a deposed and intercommuned minister (a Presbyterian) “did baptize diverse children in the parish of Kilterne, such as a child to the Laird of Foulis.”² Foulis was a Covenanter and the baptism was at his house. In the Highlands, the practice has varied from faithful adherence to the Act of 1690 to complete disregard. “In most cases,” writes Burt in 1729, “the infant’s being brought to church is not to be dispensed with, though it be never in so weak a condition, but here (Inverness) they are not so scrupulous in that and some other particulars.”³ Lane Buchanan writing of the Hebrides in 1785, says: “Baptism is administered in public or in private just as it suits the convenience of themselves and the minister.”⁴ For south Argyll at the end of the eighteenth century, the minister of Kilfinan (Alexander Macfarlane) states that infants are carried to church the first or second day after birth, be the infant never so frail or the weather so wild. Parents refused the option of baptism in the home.⁵ For north Argyll, on the other hand, Norman MacLeod, speaking of his father’s pastorate in Morven about the same period, recalls that “at Corrie Borradale . . . beside a clear well, children have been baptised.”⁶ John Cameron of Halkirk baptized John MacDonald, the future Apostle of the North, on an open moor on a winter’s day, having to break the ice on an adjacent burn with the butt of his gun to obtain baptismal water. John MacDonald, when minister of Ferintosh, notes in his Diary, under date 1818, his own practice in that extensive parish. “In the afternoon, held a diet of baptisms at the schoolhouse;” on another occasion, he “held a diet of baptisms at Hector Urquhart’s house . . . The custom in this, as in many other parishes was to arrange for the baptism of a group of children in a certain district in a house or school on a day previously intimated in church. The worship included the preaching of the Word and MacDonald says that at Culbocken, in his parish on such an occasion, he preaches on Titus iii.5, “The waters of regeneration.” The same practice obtained in Orkney. Mr. Gerard, minister of Ronaldshay and Burray, visited Burray when there were a number of children to be baptized. Parents and friends assembled in a barn or suitable house. Worship was conducted and the sacrament administered.⁷ Two distinguished natives of North Uist, the one a former moderator of the General Assembly, the other a well-known Celtic scholar, tell me that they never, in their boyhood days in Uist, saw a baptism in church. It was always in the home. The

¹ *Ibid.*, I, 171.

² *Inverness and Dingwall Pres. Rec.*, 339

⁴ *Travels in Hebrides*, 168.

⁶ *A Highland Parish*, 114.

⁷ *Two Old Pulpit Worthies of Orkney*, 31.

³ *Burt*, II, 236.

⁵ *First Stat. Account*, XIV, 261.

same has been true for my own part of Skye. In the Free Presbyterian Church and in most cases in the Free Church, the principle of public baptism is formally recognised or enforced, but in practice this often means that pulpit intimation is made that a diet of baptisms will be held in a certain house on a certain day.

(3) *The Minister of Baptism.* The Directory of 1645 expressly provided that "Baptism . . . is not to be administered in any case by any private person, but by a minister of Christ, called to be the steward of the mysteries of God." This was a re-affirmation of the position of the Reformers. "Who may administer the sacraments? Only the minister of the Word of God." (Craig's Catechism) This limitation, rigorously enforced by Presbyterians and Episcopalians in times of their alternate supremacy, was directed against the Roman belief in the absolute necessity of baptism for salvation. On the Roman belief, lay baptism, in cases where death appeared to be imminent, had overwhelming justification. As we have already seen, the Reformers accepted as valid baptism administered by a Roman priest, though they strictly forbade readers, whether or not they were in priests orders, to give baptism. Difficulties arose within the Reformed Church when, in the 17th and 18th centuries, ministers who were evicted from their parishes, or excommunicated for political offences, continued to perform ministerial acts in disobedience to the party in power. "Disorderly baptisms" occupied the continued attention of Synods and Presbyteries both under the Presbyterian and Episcopalian regimes. The validity of such baptisms was sometimes denied as when the Synod of Argyll in 1650 declared the baptisms administered by Duncan MacCalman, deposed for malignancy, "to stand in no force at all."¹ Under the Restoration Episcopacy, parents were punished for receiving the benefit of baptism from "outed" ministers, but there is no declaration that such baptisms, though illegal, were invalid. In the early 18th century, Presbyterian opinion was offended when non-juring Episcopalians rebaptised persons "who were sprinkled in the establishment." The non-jurors "deny the validity of the ordination of ministers of the establishment and rebaptize."²

Within the Established Church, there arose, out of Moderate-Evangelical tension, a kind of irregular baptism that was the cause of dispeace in many parishes. The Evangelical laity did not question the ministerial orders of Moderate ministers, but many of them did question whether they were in a state of grace and consequently were unwilling to receive sealing ordinances at their hands. Warden of Gargunnoch implies that this was

¹ *Synod of Argyll*, I, 171.

² *Royal Bounty Minutes*, 1728.

a problem in the Lowlands as well. He refers to "the ignorance and folly of some in our day who speak as if they boasted . . . upon having been baptized by ministers of more eminent gifts and graces than others . . . giving too much glory to the servant."¹ In the Highlands, "deserters" from moderate parishes would seek baptism from an Evangelical minister and to avoid giving cause for complaint to the Presbytery, the baptismal party would come at dead of night to the manse of the chosen minister. Well known Highland Evangelical ministers were guilty of breaches of church order by abetting this practice.² Norman MacLeod, later the founder of the Waipu colony in New Zealand, when schoolmaster in Ullapool, doubted whether his minister, Dr. Ross of Lochbroom, was in a state of grace and walked with his wife and child the fifty miles to Lochcarron to get baptism from Lachlan MacKenzie. He found Dr. Ross a guest in Lochcarron Manse and returned home with his mission unaccomplished. Sometimes the doubts about the spiritual standing of the minister were absurdly scrupulous. John MacCowan, "the fifth praying man in Skye," would not seek baptism from Malcolm MacLeod of Snizort, though he was reckoned one of the Evangelical lights of the island in the early part of last century; but when MacLeod died, MacCowan sought baptism from his successor, Simon MacLachlan.³ The Moderate-Evangelical tension, which caused Evangelicals to avoid receiving the sacraments from Moderate ministers, was increased by the Disruption crisis. During the ministry of Charles Grant, Kingussie, who remained in the Establishment, a Free Church woman, visiting the wife of a parishioner who had a child to be baptized, said: "I hope you will never allow the paws of the dog (the parish minister) to put a drop of water on the face of the child."⁴

In Glen Urquhart, during the unsatisfactory ministry of James Doune Smith, inducted in 1815, a group of dissident parishioners sought baptism outside the Church from George Cowie, Huntly, the leader of Evangelical Independency in the north-east and a disciple of the Haldane brothers.⁵ In the Presbyterian Church, however, there was no attempt to re-baptize those who had received the ordinance in an irregular manner. The following instance of a repeated baptism only shows the great importance attached by the people to the correct administration of the rite. In 1783, a child was re-baptized in the parish of Kenmore. During the first baptismal service, which was in the church, a woman fainted and in the con-

¹ *Sacrament of Baptism*, J. Warden. Edin. 1724, p. 21.

² Among others, Fraser of Alness and Sutherland of Golspie.

³ *Men of Skye*, J. MacCowan, 24.

⁴ *Transactions of Gaelic Society of Inverness*, XIV, 213.

⁵ *Urquhart and Glenmoriston*, W. MacKay, 380: *Lochaber and its Evangelical Traditions*, J. MacLeod.

fusion, the minister omitted the words "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." Proof having been afterwards given that the omission was really made, the minister's successor agreed to re-baptize, considering that the words "In the name of the Father etc." were indispensibly necessary to the right celebration of the sacrament.¹

Baptism by unauthorised persons. Owing to the long continued belief among the people that baptism was necessary to salvation and owing to the often inadequate provision of ordained ministers, laymen and women gave baptism, which in the case of the midwife's baptism was regarded as incomplete till baptism was administered by a cleric and in other cases, such as is reported by Martin Martin in St. Kilda, was regarded as complete and final. During the 17th and 18th centuries, the courts of the Church waged a continuous war against this practice. In 1653, the people of Jura, being without a minister, received baptism for some of their children from some unknown person or persons on a visiting English ship. "There being great presumptions that the same was not done by any minister . . ." Mr. Dougall Campbell is ordained to "cite these people before him and labour to make them sensible of their fault." It was discovered that "they did it out of ignorance."² In 1656, Manis McRaink, shoemaker, Ulva, "tooke on him, being a poore ignorant mane, to administrate the sacrament of baptism ane odious thing to midle with holy things without a call." He was sentenced to appear publicly in every church in the Presbytery that he may be an example to others.³ In 1674, John McFinlay vic conil donich is referred by the session of Contin to the Presbytery of Dingwall 'for disorderly baptizing of Infants'; and, having confessed his fault, done, he said, through ignorance, he was "remitted to the session to satisfie *in sacco*."⁴ Lane Buchanan, quoting George Buchanan as authority, states that, during the 16th century, the proprietor sent a priest once a year along with the procurator to St. Kilda to baptize the children and that in the absence of the priest, every one baptized his own child.⁵ A century later, the practice is roughly similar. The minister comes once a year to administer ordinances. At other times, the parent calls in the officer (maor) or one of the neighbours to baptize, another neighbour acting as sponsor.⁶ Pennant (c.1770) states that "in many parts of the Highlands, it is still a rule to have at least partial baptism administered . . . one who was not a cleric could sprinkle the

¹ *In Famed Breadalbane*, W. A. Gillies, 321.

² *Synod of Argyll Minutes*, II, 28.

³ *Ibid.*, II, 127.

⁴ *Inverness and Dingwall Pres. Rec.*, 333.

⁵ *Travels in the Hebrides*, 140.

⁶ *Voyage to St. Kilda*, Ed. D. J. MacLeod, p. 446.

child." "Mother and child are not considered safe till the one is baptized and the other has paid her devotions in some chapel" writes Mrs. Grant of Laggan.¹ "After the child is born," writes Dr. Carmichael, "it is baptized by the nurse; this is called 'baisteadh breth' or birth baptism."² By the time he wrote, however, the practice seems to have been confined to the Roman Catholic population. There is certainly no trace of it today among Presbyterians.

(4) *The Name in Baptism.* "A child's name must not be used till it gets it in baptism. It has no name till then. It is not safe from evil powers or the fairies till it is christened."³ So wrote Dr. Alexander MacBain. In the case of lay baptism, of which mention has already been made, a temporary name was given. In the case of a male child, it was usually "Maol Dombhnaich", "servant of the Lord." "Perhaps the holy name will avert from my love all evil spells." In the case of a female child, the temporary name was often "Gredach" or "Gertrude." The permanent name was given at the clerical baptism.⁴ When parents lost a number of children in succession, they often had the idea that the introduction of a strange name would bring a change of fortune. Gregorson Campbell of Tiree calls this name "ainm rathaid" or "road name", because, in some places, it was the custom to choose the name of the first person of the appropriate sex met on the way to baptism. In ordinary circumstances, a new name was introduced into a family with extreme reluctance. There are today a number of families known to me in which two or three children each bear the same name, called after a particular relative. There is reason to believe that despite the Shorter Catechism, some people still attach undue significance to the bestowing of the name in baptism. This may be partly due to a survival from the transition period between paganism and Christianity when the convert who bore a pagan name was given a "Christian" name on being baptized; though on this assumption it is difficult to see how pagan names like Donald and Angus could have maintained their popularity. The old conception of the "taran" which was the soul of the unbaptized child, was common not only in the Gaelic Highlands, but in the north-east of Scotland.⁵ The "taran" was perpetually bewailing its fate, because, by lack of baptism, it possessed neither name nor personality nor home in the universe. The background of this popular belief is surely that the people felt that a child only became a person when incorporated into the Body of Christ.

¹ *Superstitions of the Highlanders*, I, 164.

² *Carmina Gadelica*, III, 2.

³ *Transactions of the Gaelic Soc. of Inverness*, XIV, 254.

⁴ *Home Life of the Highlanders*, K. MacLeod of Gigha.

⁵ *Primitive Beliefs of the North East*, J. MacPherson.

(5) *Belief that Baptism was absolutely necessary to salvation.* "What if our children die without baptism?" "Yet they are saved by the promise." Thus succinctly does John Craig's Catechism sum up the Reformed position. Yet parents and ministers incurred guilt if they placed any hindrance in the way of the child receiving baptism. James VI, pressing for the relaxation of the rule that baptism must always be in church, was asked if he believed that the child would be damned if it were not baptized. "No", replied the king, "but you will if you refuse to baptize a dying child."¹ Among the pressing reasons advanced in 1724 for planting new churches in the vast parish of Durness, which then measured fifty miles in length by nine in breadth, was that "children died without baptism."² Parents were frightened at the thought that their children should die without receiving the ordinance and there are quite a number of cases of the fathers of illegitimate children taking violent measures to secure baptism without, if possible, giving grounds to the church courts to proceed against them for fornication. In the mid eighteenth century, Macara, minister of Fortingall, passing through a pine wood on his way to a catechising, was stopped by a band of armed men and compelled, on pain of death, to baptize an ailing illegitimate child.³

The persisting common belief in the absolute necessity of baptism to salvation was of considerable practical importance to the Counter-Reformation missionaries during the 17th and 18th centuries. There were gaps in the Protestant defences and the Roman agents made effective use of them. Dr. MacLean argues that the extent of their success was exaggerated by the missionaries,⁴ but still it was notable. The *Statutes of Bishop Nicolson* ordained "that clergy were not to baptize the children of Protestants . . . except . . . there were proximate danger of death, or the refusal of the ministers to baptize, the sponsors in all cases to be Catholics,"⁵ but it is certain that this limitation was not adhered to. "Priests insinuate themselves on sick persons and when children are to be baptized . . . They bring people they marry under a solemn obligation and oath against the Protestant religion."⁶ The Royal Bounty Committee employed missionary ministers (unordained) to supplement the parochial ministry in the more extensive Highland parishes. In 1731, at the request of the Committee, the Assembly authorised the ordination of the missionaries. "Some Protestants" stated the Committee, "because of their

¹ *Worship of Scottish Reformed Church*, MacMillan, 256.

² *Transactions of Gaelic Soc. of Inverness*, XI, 298.

³ *Reminiscences and Reflections*, D. Campbell, 68.

⁴ *Counter Reformation in Scotland*, passim.

⁵ *Bellesheim*, 169.

⁶ MS "State of Popery in Scotland, 1713-1737."

distance from the church do call priests to visit the sick and baptize their children when the missionary preacher is not ordained.”¹ In 1765, Dr. John Walker, affirmed that the number of ordained men was still inadequate. “Many of the Protestants in the north, being very remote from the parish minister have their children on many occasions baptized by the popish priest from the opinion that baptism is necessary to salvation, which is a general persuasion of the commons in the Highlands. The children when they grow up think themselves bound to adhere to the Roman Church and even their Protestant parents are careful to keep them steadfast in that communion in which they have been baptized.”² In the middle of the 18th century, the revolt against the compulsory registration of births and baptisms, involving a fee for the session clerk, led to a serious Rome-ward movement in such parishes as Kintail, Glenelg, Moidart. In Kintail, there were several hundred converts.³ Roman and Reformed baptism being equally passports to salvation, the people accepted the baptism that entailed no fee. It should be remembered that, till the dissemination of modern knowledge in the Highlands, the salvation to which baptism was a passport included protection from mischievous and unfriendly powers such as fairies etc., as well as an assurance of entrance into heaven. That among instructed Evangelicals, baptism could bestow a spiritual comfort closely akin to the Roman belief is seen by the witness of Dr. Alexander Beith, once of Glenelg, later of Stirling. Bereft of his children, he takes their baptism as “an assurance on God’s part, that he will accomplish, in their experience, all that He has promised. Their safety is not left as a doubtful thing.”⁴

(6) *Confirmation of Baptismal Vows.* “What thing then is baptism to our children?” “An entrie into the Church of God and to the holy supper.” The Lord’s Supper is not ministered to infants “because they cannot examine themselves.” Thus John Craig’s Catechism. When the baptized person is capable of examining himself and is able to give a credible profession of faith, he can be admitted without further rite to the Lord’s Supper. In 1668, the Synod of Dunblane, feeling that something like formal confirmation was needed, recommended to the brethren that at their set times for catechising and examining their people “they would take particulare notice of young persones and towards their first admission to Holy Communion; and haveing before taken account of their knowledge of the grounds of religion, would then cause them each one particu-

¹ *Royal Bounty Minutes.*

² Walker MS, Tolbooth Library.

³ *Counter Reformation in Scotland*, D. MacLean, 232, note.

⁴ *Sorrowing yet always Rejoicing*, 1878, p. 16.

larly and expreslie to declaire their belieff in the Christaine faith into which in their infancie they were baptized and remynding them of their baptismal vow . . . would requyre of them ane explycit owneing of that vow . . . And then, in their prayer . . . would recommend the said young persones now thus engaged to the effectuall blessing of God . . . and His signature upon them sealling them to the day of Redemption."¹ The service thus recommended was to be carried out entirely by the parish minister, without the presence of the bishop. The bishop is indeed careful to quote "the general approbacioun of the most famous reformers" for the practice. Nothing so approaching a formal rite of confirmation won approval among Presbyterians till our own day. John Willison, whose *Mother's Catechism in Gaelic* used to be in almost every Highland home as a companion to the *Shorter Catechism*, is a fit representative of the main stream of Presbyterian opinion that the penitent and believing baptized person, in making his personal decision to seek admission to the Lord's Table, has thereby confirmed his baptismal vows. "It is not enough that ye were baptized and are Christians by your parents' dedication, unless you be Christians by your own free choice and consent. You ought personally and explicitly to renew your baptismal covenant and to ratify your parents' deed . . . I call to you to engage here (in admission to the Lord's Supper) in no more than what you are already obliged to by your baptism. If you fail to fulfil the obligations of your baptism, your baptism will be a witness against you."² It is striking how few Evangelical preachers, unlike Willison, have based their appeal to their people on their Christian status as baptized persons.

(7) *Popular Beliefs in connection with baptism.* The 'bonnach baiste' or christening cake, neatly tied in a white handkerchief, laid on the child's breast when carried to church and offered to the first person met on the way, was a custom obtaining in many other places as well as the Highlands. It appears to have no theological significance. The baptismal water was, however, an element to which popular piety was inclined to attach a sancity which verged on superstition. "I am sorry" writes James Hall "that many of the Highlanders imagine that the virtue of baptism consists in the water after a blessing has been prayed for it by the clergyman."³ In a letter to Dr. George Henderson, the Celtic scholar, Rev. Donald Macfarlane of Gigha, said that one of his parishioners had ascribed the abnormal behaviour of his boy to the fault of the minister "who put far too little water on him at his baptism."⁴ (*Survival of Belief*, p. 218). At

¹ *Register of Synod of Dunblane*, 64.

² *Sacramental Directory*, 159.

³ *Travels* (1800).

⁴ *Survivals of Belief*, 218.

a baptism in Orkney, the woman demanded fresh water for the baptism of the second child, as if the virtue of the water had been exhausted by the first administration.¹ A well-known Free Church minister has told me of a fairly recent case in Wester Ross where, after a baptism, the mother said that the baptismal water should be taken out and buried. Robert Bruce, expounding the Reformed doctrine, said that the baptismal water was holy as long as the action lasted, but that it ceased to be holy when the sacramental act was over. In the Ross-shire case, the mother thought the consecrated water to have some material potency. There is mention of the addition of salt to the water in one or two of the earlier church records and I have known of at least one modern instance in the West Highlands where the minister found a silver coin placed in the baptismal water. The healing efficacy of silver water, "uisge far airgid", was believed in up to fairly recent times. Many ministers, I imagine, have come across cases where an ailing child recovered immediately after receiving baptism. Catherine Collace, whose memoirs were favourite devotional reading with past generations of Evangelicals, being herself sick and having long delayed seeking baptism for her children, was made to apply Exodus IV.24 (where the Lord sought to slay Moses by the way in the inn because he had not circumcised his child) to herself. She immediately sent for a minister, who baptized the children and she at once recovered, and thereby got a notable confirmation of infant baptism.² Here it is the parent and not the child who is healed. The death of unbaptized children compelled the question whether they should be buried with baptized Christians. For adherents of the old faith, the matter was simple. They must be buried in unconsecrated ground. For instructed Presbyterians, the matter was also simple. The children of believers are federally holy even before baptism and "therefore the practice of denying burial among Christians to children unbaptized is unagreeable to this doctrine and is most unwarrantable."³ But old habits of thought have a habit of persisting in defiance of a rational faith. Two centuries after the Reformation, John Galt could make the minister of Dalmailing refer to "that part of the kirkyard where unchristened babies are laid." Writing about Iona, Martin Martin (c. 1690) refers to "the empty piece of ground between the church and the gardens where murderers and children who die before baptism are buried."⁴ "Cladh na Cloinne gun bhaisteadh," "The burying ground of unbaptized children", is near the parish church of Lismore. Dr. Alex. Carmichael says: "On the farm of Cralacan, there is a shelf

¹ *Two Old Orkney Pulpit Worthies* (Gerard).

² *Memoirs and Exercises of Catherine Collace*, 46.

³ *Pardovan*, 4th Ed., 276.

⁴ *Description of Western Islands of Scotland*, Ed. D. J. MacLeod, 287.

among the rocks where unbaptized infants were buried and that within the memory of persons still living."¹ There is an old graveyard in Mull entirely given up to unbaptized children.² It is needless to add that Presbyterians do not countenance this practice today.

(8) The spiritual climate in which some of these beliefs and half-beliefs continued to exist, if not to flourish, long after the Reformation is, at least on the surface, far removed from the mood prevailing in certain movements which it is necessary now to notice. The first is the Separatist movement. It was a by-product of the conflict in Ross and Sutherland between the courts of the Church and the "Men" over the matter of the sacramental Fellowship Meetings. Donald Sage states that the first overt breach with the Church occurred in Kildonan during his father's ministry in that parish. The date of the incident is about 1797 and John Grant was the lay leader.³ The movement spread into Caithness, Sutherland, Ross and Invernessshire and was fairly influential till the Disruption. The Separatists "absented themselves from the parish church. They held their own meetings and that at canonical hours, so that they were rivals to the ordinary services of the Church."⁴ They denounced the Church. Its ministers, even the most fervently Evangelical, were anathematised. On the face of it, they appear to have been precursors of the modern "Brethren"; but this was not so. A commission of the General Assembly appointed to investigate separatism in the Highlands reported in 1842: "They are not dissenters in the ordinary sense of the word . . . Proselytising attempts . . . made by agents of religious bodies differing from the Church of Scotland . . . were invariably unsuccessful. They will join neither the Baptists nor the Independents nor the Secession nor the Episcopalians; and a large proportion of the Presbyterian population of the parish (Duthil) was in the singular position of dissent, in a greater or less degree, from the ministry of the local clergyman and yet of firm adherence . . . to the fellowship of the Church of Scotland. The baptism of their children was always by a minister of the Establishment and almost always, the Commission believes, by the pastor of the parish." The case of Glen Urquhart, where the separatists got baptism from an Independent minister, is the one exception. Norman MacLeod, the leader of the Assynt Separatists, was a probationer of the Church. Ordained in America, he organised the first Presbyterian congregation in Cape Breton, but it is said that neither there nor later in Waipu, New Zealand, did he

¹ *Carmena Gadilica*, III, 3.

² *Worship of Scottish Reformed Church*, MacMillan, 298.

³ *North Country Separatists*, J. MacLeod, 9: *Memorabilia Domestica*, D. Sage, 98.

⁴ *North Country Separatists*, 16.

celebrate the Lord's Supper and rarely administered baptism.¹ He held that very few people came up to the standard of holiness required for these ordinances. The Separatists believed in the Church and Sacraments, but the earthly Church fell far short of their ideal.

(9) The mission of the brothers James and Robert Haldane had far-reaching consequences. It quickened the spiritual life of the Church both in the Highlands and Lowlands. But the Moderate antagonists of the Haldane missionaries had sound reasons for their fears. The principle of the "gathered church" was basic in the Haldane movement. Aikman, as its spokesman, declared "the indispensable necessity of the people of God being separated in religious fellowship from all such societies as permitted visible unbelievers to continue in their communion" and "of uniting exclusively with those whom it was meet and fit that we should judge to be all children of God."² The Haldanes and many of their followers took the logical step of separating from the Church and setting up Independent congregations. In the Highlands, though Independent congregations were set up here and there from Wick to Glenlyon, the majority of those who came under the Haldane influence stayed in the Church "into which they brought a hotter and more intolerant spirit than many of the best Evangelical ministers approved of."³ In 1808, James and Robert Haldane became Baptists. Their decision rent the Congregational societies in twain. Lachlan Mackintosh of Grantown and his disciple, Peter Grant, the famous Gaelic hymnwriter, had adopted Baptist views before the Haldanes' conversion and they were the fore-runners of a small but devoted band of missionaries who sought to convert the Highland people to their views. The Baptist Home Missionary Society, founded in 1827 and in 1829, adopting the significant addition to their title "Chiefly for the Highlands and Islands," sought to consolidate the little groups of Baptists which came into existence in the wake of the Haldane revivals and also to break new ground. In Strathspey, founding on the work of Lachlan Macintosh and Peter Grant, the Baptists built up a strong cause with its centre in Grantown. Communities came into existence in Inverness, Wick, Oban, Lochgilphead and in a number of the islands, Islay, Mull, Colonsay, Tiree and for a short time, in Skye.⁴ The Baptist Church in Keiss, Caithness, founded in 1750 by Sir William Sinclair of Dunbeath, "the preaching knight", was the only Baptist cause in the north that did not trace its origin to the revival movements of the early 19th century. The failure, for failure it was, to make a more impressive impact on the

¹ *Highlanders of Walpu*, G. MacDonald.

² *Memoirs of the Haldanes*, 233.

³ *Campbell's Reminiscences and Reflections*, 76.

⁴ *History of the Baptists in Scotland*.

Presbyterian Highlands has been attributed to the divisive spirit which zealous Baptists brought into the religiously awakened groups.¹ It has also been attributed to what some rigid Presbyterians regarded as laxity of doctrine. Peter Grant's poem "A Young Child in Heaven", with his "unhesitating belief in the child's salvation and his allusion to her blameless innocence, were viewed by the 'Men' as tainted with error."² A less serious but probably more effective reason for the Baptist failure was the ease with which the open-air baptism, in pond or river, could be and was burlesqued. The main reason, it may be affirmed was that the people felt that infant baptism was congruous with the teaching of Scripture and Catechism.

(10) An interesting and significant by-product of the evangelistic campaigns in the Highlands towards the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century was a depreciation of the value of the sacraments for the spiritual life of the converts. This was something new in Highland religion. Highland Evangelicals had been wont to regard the great sacramental assemblies as the supreme evangelistic occasion and Highland Moderates, though in more tepid fashion, made attendance at the Lord's Supper a duty. Baptism was universally desired. Indeed, Peter Grant, the hymn-writer, makes their simple faith in the sacraments a matter of reproach: "Without sense of understanding about eternity, they had never heard that there was such a thing as godliness; the hope that was in their head was baptism and partaking of communion and the rite of marriage." A little earlier than Grant's time, Neil Douglas, the Relief Church missionary, noted that "a threat of the forfeiture of these privileges, should they not be submissive, is most alarming to most of the (Highland) people."³ And even the Separatists attended Communion and had their children baptized. The "Bracadale Case," which occupied the attention of the Assembly from 1824 till 1835 and indeed up to the eve of the Disruption revealed to the whole church that large numbers of people who had been touched by the Haldane revivals and professed high spiritual attainments were disregarding the sacraments, especially baptism. This disconcerting and pointed neglect was especially strong in Skye, but it was also apparent in other parts of the Western Highlands and Islands. Before discussing the "Bracadale Case", we must recall that both in theory and in practice, Highland Evangelicals demanded a lower standard of spiritual attainment from applicants for baptism than from candidates for admission to Communion. "At the August Com-

¹ *Men of Skye*, MacCowan, 9.

² *Duthil, Past and Present*, D. MacLean, 22.

³ *Journal of a Mission*, 163.

mission of the Free Church Assembly some years after the Disruption," wrote "Freelance" in a book called "The Future Church of Scotland", published about 1870, "Dr. Candlish strongly condemned the practice of baptizing the children of non-communicants and that the Free Church must grapple with it to procure its abolition . . . The Free Church, though comprising nearly the whole of the population of the Northern Highlands, dare not grapple with it."

Some twenty years before "Freelance", Dr. Kennedy of Dingwall, in his "Days of the Fathers in Ross-shire," gave an able defence of the Highland attitude to the two sacraments. Referring to the general view obtaining in the Lowlands "that both sacraments being seals of the same covenant . . . ought to be administered on the same footing" and that "the Christian profession required of a parent cannot be complete without being a communicant," he says that this in fact means that "all members above a certain age go to the Lord's Table . . . any communicant received baptism for his children." The Ross-shire Fathers, on the other hand held that the two sacraments differed in some respects as sealing ordinances, and Dr. Kennedy agrees with them. "Baptism, being the door of admission into the visible church, a larger exercise of charity is required in dealing with applicants for that sacrament than is called for in administering the other, which implies a confirmation of those who were members before." While baptism is the sacrament of admission, the Lord's Supper is the sacrament of nurture. Therefore, "the rule of Scripture requires baptism to be given on an *uncontradicted profession of faith*, while an *accredited profession* is required to justify the Church in granting admission to the Lord's Table. The result . . . parents who have never communicated receive baptism for their children."¹ This expresses the traditional Highland attitude to the two sacraments, particularly in the counties north of Inverness. It is almost as dominant today in the Church of Scotland in these counties as in the smaller Presbyterian communions.

The (Haldanite) missionaries of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel at Home, mostly enthusiastic laymen who, whether consciously or unconsciously, favoured the conception of the "gathered church", made a rudely disturbing impact on both Moderate and Evangelical parishes. They brought with them a carelessness about the old traditions and a negative attitude to the Church as an institution. In 1810, one of them, a Mr. Farquharson, visited Skye. His evangelistic tour resulted in one (possibly two) conversions.² The one certain conversion was that of Donald Munro, blind catechist and parish fiddler at Portree. Munro was a

¹ *Days of the Fathers in Ross-shire*, Ed. 1927, 126ff.

² *History of Revivals of Religion in the British Isles*, Duncan, 34.

man of great spiritual gifts. He began an evangelistic campaign which influenced the whole island, but particularly the parishes of Kilmuir, Bracadale and Portree. Under his lead, prayer groups, at which exhortation was given, were established. The prayer meeting at Kilmuir was especially strong. People flocked to the revival meetings, and deserted the parish churches. The ministers refused "church ordinances" to the deserters; but instead of being cowed by the deprivation, as they would have been a generation earlier, they retorted by professing to regard the sacraments and participation in them as the sure marks of an inferior religion. "There followed from this vital moment," says Dr. Beith (Highland Tour with Dr. Candlish) "that abandonment of ordinances as administered by the parochial clergy . . . which led to the appointment of the (Assembly) Commission of 1835." Like the Separatists in this respect, the "professors of religion" remained attached to the national establishment, but they attended Munro's meetings. It soon therefore "ceased to be a matter of reproach to live without ordinances; rather was it considered a mark of *seriousness* not to apply for ordinances and a want of religion if you sought ordinances from the parish minister."¹

In 1822, Roderick MacLeod, son of the minister of Snizort, was ordained as minister of Bracadale. His predecessor, James Shaw, who had previously been assistant in the neighbouring parish of Duirinish, was a man of blameless life and Evangelical sympathies. His attitude to the sacraments, reflected in the fact that at his death there were apparently no unbaptized children in the parish and that out of a population of about 2,000 there were 250 communicants, was similar to that expounded by Dr. Kennedy of Dingwall. MacLeod, whose change from a dutiful moderatism to a fervent evangelicalism began with a reading of Bellamy's "Christian Religion Delimited" and continued through his friendship with Donald Munro and his converts, began a new policy in Bracadale. He held that admission to both sacraments had been indiscriminate and promiscuous. Refusing to accept an "uncontradicted profession" for applicants for baptism, he required that for both sacraments equally there should be real evidence of a saving change. While his eloquence filled Bracadale Church, the number of communicants dropped in two years from 250 to 10 and MacLeod refused baptism to all applicants whom he did not consider fit to admit to the Lord's Table. Dr. Mackintosh MacKay says that the popular mind was on MacLeod's side. "Many would not receive the sacraments because they became conscious of unworthiness;"² and he considered that a major factor in this development was the now very large circulation of the Gaelic Scriptures and the

¹ *Highland Tour with Dr. Candlish*, Beith.

² *Sermon on Death of Roderick MacLeod*, Edin. 1869.

work of the Gaelic Schools Society. There were some however in the parish who resented the refusal of the sacraments, especially baptism. When the first appeal to the Presbytery of Skye against the enforcement of the new policy was made two and a half years after MacLeod's induction, there were fifty unbaptized children in the parish and only seven had been baptized. The matter came to the General Assembly in 1824 and then in 1827. The fact that MacLeod found numerous and able supporters in the Assembly suggests that there was considerable disquiet throughout the Church about the administration of baptism. "What do you expect" asked the Rev. Lewis Rose in the 1827 debate "if ministers teach parents that they are good Christians if they are baptized?" And in the 1824 debate John MacDonald of Ferintosh put the case for MacLeod in words that must have troubled uneasy consciences in the Assembly: "He does not refuse baptism; he refuses it in the present circumstances to those who apply and he does so because it is contrary to his conviction of his duty as laid down by the standards of the Church and sanctioned by the Bible." Through Dr. Chalmers' wise and tactful dealing, MacLeod was brought to acknowledge that he acted wrongly in disobeying the Presbytery of Skye without lodging an appeal against their injunction and he was therefore absolved from the suspension which they had imposed. He did not change his convictions or his practice and there is little doubt that he won the bulk of his people to his views. The Commission of Assembly appointed in 1835 "to visit the Highlands and to enquire generally into the religious condition of the people and report" concentrated their attention mainly on Skye. They found a widespread neglect of baptism and curiously, that it was not so much in Bracadale as in the other Skye parishes that the greatest number of unbaptized children were found. The Commission was re-appointed in 1837 and again 1839 with the wider remit "to consider the state of matters in the country generally." The Disruption crisis was at hand, however and, says Dr. Beith, a member of the Commission, "no more was heard of the dreadful condition of things in Skye." MacLeod meant nobly in his endeavour to raise the standard for baptism; but the outcome was that he trained the mass of his people to live without the sacraments. Dr. Chalmers, in his speech in the 1827 debate, conceded that the openly profane should be excluded from the sacraments. He affirmed that in more doubtful cases a good deal must always be left to the delicate discretion of the minister, but he pleaded that the Church should not repel from the sacraments the middle class of persons, usually the majority in every congregation, who are neither openly profane nor obviously saints. It is the duty of the minister to confront them with the demands of the Gospel. If he does so earnestly, he is free from guilt if they should afterwards prove unworthy. In any case,

the question of a person's admissibility to the sacraments turns not on what he has been, but on what he purposes to do, not on the performance of the past but on the promises for the future. It is a speech which will amply repay careful study in connection with the baptismal practice of our day.

The issues raised by the "Bracadale Case" are by no means dead today. They will remain a concern for ministers and sessions, for they have the burden of admitting or repelling candidates for the sacraments. When that duty is taken seriously, there will be occasions when the session will be accused of prejudice and partiality. And the charge will sometimes be just. It will never be easy to maintain the golden mean between laxity and undue rigidity. A generally accepted code of Christian character and conduct is necessary if sessions are not to give widely divergent judgements. For past generations of Highland Evangelicals, such a code, roughly speaking, was provided by the "uncontradicted profession," in the case of baptism and by the "accredited profession" in the case of the Lord's Supper. The content of the "uncontradicted profession" varied somewhat from district to district and from generation to generation; but it included a decent moral life, fairly regular church attendance, a strict observance of the Sabbath and when, about the middle of the nineteenth century, the temperance movement gained strength in the Highlands, awkward questions might be asked about excessive indulgence at market, funerals and marriages. The practice of daily family worship, which was general in Evangelical parishes in Ross and Sutherland in the eighteenth century and in the rest of the Highlands after the revivals was also one of the marks of an "uncontradicted profession." In addition to examining the outward evidences of a Christian life, ought kirk sessions to search the secret places of the heart, lest by unhappy chance wolves be admitted to the fold of Christ? This is the question which Roderick MacLeod and his session answered in the affirmative; and on the whole, the testimony of our Scottish Reformed Church is that they erred.
